

Committee on Resources, Full Committee

- - Rep. James V. Hansen, Chairman

U.S. House of Representatives, Washington, D.C. 20515-6201 - - (202) 225-2761

Witness Statement

**TESTIMONY BEFORE THE HOUSE RESOURCES COMMITTEE ON HR 701,
THE CONSERVATION AND REINVESTMENT ACT
by DAVID WALLER, PAST PRESIDENT
INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF FISH AND WILDLIFE AGENCIES
June 20, 2001**

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. My name is David Waller, Director of the Georgia Wildlife Resources Division, and a past President of the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies. As you are aware, all 50 states are members of the Association.

The Association sincerely appreciates the opportunity to appear before your Committee today to share with you the collective and continued strong support of the 50 State Fish and Wildlife Agencies for HR 701, the Conservation and Reinvestment Act, a bill that will ensure a conservation legacy for all Americans. This bill is unquestionably the most significant legislative initiative for fish and wildlife (and other natural resources) conservation in the last several decades. Whether you hunt, fish, bird watch, hike, play soccer or just enjoy the peace and tranquility of being outdoors appreciating the vast natural bounty of our Nation, this bill will ensure that our children and future generations will enjoy this bountiful natural wealth.

The International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies was founded in 1902 as a quasi-governmental organization of public agencies charged with the protection and management of North America's fish and wildlife resources. The Association's governmental members include the fish and wildlife agencies of the states, provinces, and federal governments of the U.S., Canada, and Mexico. The Association has been a key organization in promoting sound resource management and strengthening federal, state, and private cooperation in protecting and managing fish and wildlife and their habitats in the public interest.

Let me also thank you, Chairman Hansen, and Chairman Young, Congressman Dingell, Congressman Miller, Congressman Tauzin, Congressman John and many others for your efforts in passing essentially this same bill out of the House in the last Congress. Although the bill was never acted on by the full Senate in the last Congress, your efforts to dedicate assured funding to state-based conservation and recreation programs captured the overwhelming support of the American public and your House colleagues as well as support from most Senators. It has created the momentum that brings us back here today to consider a bill that is currently cosponsored by over one-half of the House. Mr. Chairman, we remain as committed to working with you this Congress as in the last, and in this Congress, we fully expect to join you in the Rose Garden for the ceremony signing CARA into law.

The overwhelmingly bipartisan House vote in the last Congress, and robust sponsorship in this Congress for HR 701 clearly shows that conservation programs are an extremely high priority for the American people. The support for CARA, which dedicates assured funding for conservation, sends an unmistakable message that certainty for conservation program funding has finally achieved the standing in the national budget that

it truly deserves. As you know and appreciate, Mr. Chairman, natural resource conservation and recreation programs contribute significantly to our quality of life, our socio-economic stability, and our Nation's health and well-being. Just as Social Security is a financial safety net, conservation of our natural resources is resource safety net for both this and future generations. Unless Congress makes a multi-year commitment to conservation, history indicates that we postpone conservation efforts which then cost more and result in substantial impact on private and public land because species become threatened and endangered.

Stewardship of our fish and wildlife, land, coastal, and cultural resources is important to every one of our citizens. It is particularly important to future generations who will benefit from our prudent care for these resources or be burdened by our failure to do so. Good stewardship cannot be imposed from Washington, DC, or defined by regulation; it needs to be nurtured and supported at the state and community level where we live. It is clear that our nation's long-term resource conservation challenges cannot be solved by one-time fixes, cookie-cutter answers, or simply passing more regulations. The history of fluctuations and constantly shifting priorities of year-to-year appropriations underscores the fact that annual funding simply is not adequate to meet current needs or address future problems. There needs to be a comprehensive and sustained federal, state and local stewardship commitment. For these reasons, assured funding and state-based decision making are the most important fundamental provisions of CARA.

As you know, Mr. Chairman, conserving fish and wildlife species is not a one-time fix. Restoring declining species to a sustainable level is a complex, multi-year endeavor that requires the certainty of available funding for success. As an example, restoring the nation's symbol - the bald eagle - to its current status has taken four decades. It took a lot more than banning the use of certain pesticides to achieve this goal. In this case, funds were available under the Endangered Species Act, but no such funding is currently available with any certainty to address the many imperiled nongame species from which ranks will come the next listed species. With assured and dedicated funding, we can implement proactive conservation to address the early warning signs of decline. It is less expensive to restore species, and our opportunities to use voluntary incentive based, non-regulatory programs are much greater than when a species comes under the authority of the ESA. Also history indicates it is not only expensive to restore an endangered species but it may be too late.

Our experience with game and sportfish species also demonstrates the success of wildlife conservation efforts when dedicated and assured funding is available. As you know, Mr. Chairman, at the beginning of the last century, America's fish and wildlife populations were in dire circumstances from several factors. Through the dedicated efforts of the sportsmen and sportswomen of this country, working with the hunting and fishing equipment industry and state and federal fish and wildlife agencies, Congress statutorily established the Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Act (Pittman-Robertson) in 1937 and Federal Aid in Sportfish Restoration Act (Dingell-Johnson/Wallop-Breaux) in 1950 to provide dedicated and assured funding to the State fish and wildlife agencies for game and sportfish species. Those funds, along with license fees paid by hunters and anglers, have provided the foundation for America's successful fish and wildlife conservation programs over many years in bringing back species like the white-tailed deer, pronghorn antelope, wood duck, wild turkey and striped bass. Now is the time to duplicate that success with funding provided under CARA that include those fish and wildlife species (nongame species) that are neither game nor sportfish, but constitute the majority of fish and wildlife in this country. We have the expertise, we have the will, and with assured funding from CARA, we will have the resources to duplicate our successes which make our system of fish and wildlife conservation the model which other countries seek to emulate.

Also, as you are aware, assured, long-term funding is necessary to create incentives for private landowners

to provide technical and financial assistance which include such things as cooperative agreements with resource agencies to accomplish conservation objectives. These efforts would be designed to reduce the need to list endangered species by funding preventative conservation programs that restore declining species before they reach a point where listing is necessary. This helps landowners to become part of the solution through non-regulatory, incentive-based programs that can integrate their land management intentions with fish and wildlife conservation efforts.

We look forward to working with you to expeditiously report HR 701 out of your Committee, and pass it out of the House before the August recess. Let's take advantage of the tremendous opportunity afforded us in this bill to do something for all Americans!

The Association has testified several times before this Committee (and others) in the last Congress on HR 701 and other proposals that would dedicate Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) revenues to State-based enhanced programs for fish and wildlife conservation, conservation education, and wildlife associated recreation; land and water conservation; outdoor recreation; and coastal conservation and impact assistance. The Association strongly supports the Conservation and Reinvestment Act because it is a bipartisan, consensus-built, and common sense approach to conservation that makes good economic sense, good common sense, and good political sense.

We also sincerely appreciate the work of you and the other CARA champions, on and off this Committee, in amending the Wildlife Conservation and Restoration Program (Title III) authorizing language into the Pittman-Robertson statute last year through the enactment of the FY 2001 Commerce, Justice, State, the Judiciary and Related Agencies Appropriations act. That law, again through your and many other members' supportive efforts, also made available to the State fish and wildlife agencies a one-time appropriation of \$50 million to be apportioned to and expended by the States under the terms and conditions of the Wildlife Conservation and Restoration Program. I wanted to share with you that, through a truly cooperative effort between the US Fish and Wildlife Service and the State Fish and Wildlife agencies, all states and territories have been expeditiously qualified for their apportionment and are currently submitting their projects for expenditure approval so that they can do good things on the ground for fish and wildlife and our citizens. This was a good start, but as you know, more funding with greater assurances is necessary to meet the needs.

The coalition of over 4500 organizations that has come together in support of CARA, and worked so tirelessly for House passage in the last Congress and is doing so again now, truly represents both broad and diverse grass-root support of the business community, conservation organizations, elected officials at all levels of governments, industry, the recreation community and other interests. Citizens from "soccer moms" to hunters and wildlife photographers strongly support CARA. Our common goal is to bring dedicated, consistent funding to state-based fish and wildlife conservation programs; land and water conservation; coastal conservation and environmental programs; state and local outdoor recreation; historic preservation; and incentives for our landowners to continue good stewardship of their land in open space uses as farmland, ranchland and forest land. CARA places decisions on identifying needs and spending priorities at the State and local level which we believe can best reflect the interest of our citizens, and, it does that while giving greater protection than exists in current law to private property owners with respect to federal land acquisition. This coalition truly represents America's interest in our natural and cultural heritage, and our need to conserve that heritage for future generations.

As we have testified many times before, the most significant benefit of CARA to fish and wildlife conservation is that the State fish and wildlife agencies will finally be in a position to take preventative

conservation measures to address the life needs and habitat requirements of declining species before they reach a status where they must be listed as endangered or threatened species. This will save money and prevent the social and economic disruption associated with species being threatened or endangered. By acting proactively when more conservation options are available to us, the State fish and wildlife agencies can work cooperatively with private landowners through voluntary, non-regulatory means such as incentives, technical assistance, easements, and other such measures. Prevention makes good biological sense, good economic sense, and good common sense. Preventative conservation now is an investment that will continue to pay dividends far into the future. It simply costs much less to conserve fish and wildlife species by responding to early warning signs of decline, than it does to recover these species once they have to be listed.

Also, as you know, Mr. Chairman, outdoor recreation is the fastest growing industry in this country, and CARA will position the State fish and wildlife agencies to help local communities identify and take advantage of wildlife related tourism opportunities. Programs to capture these opportunities can significantly enhance the economy of these rural communities.

Let me briefly share with you today two perfecting amendments the Association would urge be made to the Wildlife Title (Title III) of the Conservation and Reinvestment Act. The Association staff will continue to work closely with your Committee staff on the details of some other technical or clarifying language suggestions.

First, we would ask for your serious consideration of eliminating the 10% spending cap restriction on wildlife related recreation expenses. In 1996, over 62 million Americans participated in wildlife viewing with an economic impact of nearly \$30 billion. Wildlife related recreation is critical in the fostering of the public's commitment to wildlife conservation - in short, responsible nature-based tourism development, the promotion of nature and birding festivals, active wildlife-watching skill-building, and other creative activities build and sustain a growing wildlife conservation constituency. Although we recognize the concern that infrastructure needs might divert needed funding away from on the ground conservation, states need to be able to provide quality, safe opportunities for wildlife viewing and photography which are not only highly popular but provide significant economic benefits to communities. Such wildlife recreation opportunities would be provided consistent with other needs for wildlife management. Also, one-time capital investments to provide wildlife related recreation facilities while maintaining ongoing programs could require more funding than the 10% annual cap would allow. State fish and wildlife agencies are in the best position to decide what mix of Title III funds should be applied to conservation, wildlife associated recreation, and conservation education, and we encourage your support for eliminating the 10% cap on expenditures for wildlife associated recreation.

Second, we strongly encourage you to allow, at the discretion of the State fish and wildlife agency, the expenditure of up to 10% of the Title III funds for conservation law enforcement activities. As you know, state fish and wildlife conservation officers have many opportunities to work with landowners and the public to implement voluntary, proactive fish and wildlife protection and public education and outreach programs. They also prevent poaching, or over-utilization of fish and wildlife resources, thereby reducing the likelihood that a species may become threatened or endangered in the future. Further, they provide for public safety, security, search and rescue functions, and resolution of outdoor user conflicts. In short, conservation law enforcement is an integral component of a comprehensive state fish and wildlife program and should, at the discretion of the State Director, be eligible for up to 10% funding under CARA.

Mr. Chairman, in closing, the Association stands ready to assist you in whatever way we can to make

programs which would be funded under CARA a reality for all of our citizens. Let's work together to pass this landmark legislation now, and provide a future for our citizens that we can all be proud of passing on.

We would be pleased to answer any questions the Committee may have.

Thank you for the opportunity to share the Association's perspectives with you.

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